

QUESTION 47

Why did Sigmund Freud doubt Shakespeare's authorship?

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It's fun to psychoanalyze the founder of psychoanalysis. Why was Freud a doubter? Was it a professional sense that the truth is always obscure and never self-evident? Was it because the facts of Shakespeare's life were irreconcilable with Freud's crassly biographical reading of Hamlet? Or was it a form of revenge on the only writer with a greater understanding of psychology than his own?

Why do we relate to Richard III? Because, Freud wrote, he magnifies something in all of us:

"We all reproach Nature for congenital disadvantages... Why did She not give us the lofty brow of genius or the noble profile of aristocracy? Why were we born in a middle-class home instead of in a royal palace?"

There's a submerged anti-Stratfordian logic here: To come from a middle class home is not something to be envied. But we envy Shakespeare. Ergo Shakespeare cannot have come from a middle class home.

Whatever lay behind Freud's doubts, it's an attempted patricide, an unconscious retaliation against an overwhelming father figure. Perhaps, after all, Freud was right about Oedipus if very wrong about William Shakespeare.